# Designing for Immediate Play

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with designing for immediate play, the experience that a player has when joining a game designed for being played without particular preparation. Museum games, urban games, casual sports, and ad-hoc multiplayer video games are kinds of games that facilitate immediate play situations. After a detailed explanation of immediate play, we analyze the context of the immediate play situation, which is mostly characterized by an overlap between different realities of the experience. The article continues by describing various design dimensions and outlining the design space those offer using examples and expert opinions. While most practices and game examples mentioned in this paper are from non-digital games, a special focus is put on the role of technology in immediately playable experiences. Still, the examined design dimensions are independent of the technological foundation of the game. This paper provides a starting point for designing better immediate play situations.

## CCS CONCEPTS

•**Human-centered computing → Interaction design;** *Interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms;* Interaction design process and methods;

## KEYWORDS

Game Design, Play Design, Immediate Play, Urban Games, Pervasive Games, Museum Games

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with particular challenges in designing for "immediate play". Immediacy means that the activity of play is entered spontaneously and unprepared as opposed to the act of joining a game in a planned way, with training, preparation, or any other steps taken in advance. We regard play as a wider practice than the playing of games following Sicart's [26] minimal definition of play. Examples of immediate play are the interaction with interactive installations in museums, many urban games, party games, and alternate reality games. Videogames can be immediate, too, if they are pick-up-and-play games that do not require reading manuals or passing tutorials. Amateur sport is also full of examples of spontaneously joined playful activities. While there is a lot of unstructured spontaneous play, e.g. in child's play, we will focus on the harder design challenge of games explicitly structured to be played immediately.

Designers creating immediately playable activities face unique challenges. This paper addresses those by proposing design tools and techniques. The authors of this paper have many years of experience in the design of games and playful media art pieces, have curated and organized art and game exhibitions and festivals, as well as public playing events. During those years they have played and playtested numerous public games, adapted games to be played publicly, and presented new playful experiences to the public. Additionally they have created commercial and artistic videogames and analog games. The research this paper is built upon is informal, though substantiated with online questionnaires answered by six experts, Philipp Ehmann – a game designer, theatre director and a co-founder of Play:Vienna festival, Holly Gramazio – a game designer and curator from Hide&Seek and currently at Matheson Marcault, Patrick Jarnfelt – a game designer and co-founder of Copenhagen Game Collective and w00t Copenhagen Play Festival, Gwyn Morfey – a game designer and a founder of Fire Hazard Games; Sebastian Quack – a game designer, curator and co-founder of Invisible Playground and Playpublik festival, and Eric Zimmerman – a game designer, academic at NYU and co- founder of Gamelab. Thus, some of our design claims and arguments are based on research and analysis of the effects of design decisions, while others are supported by expert voices. The research results are best practices and practical advices, offered with the intention of supporting the design of better immediate play experiences for digital as well as analog games. Their basis is urban games but the lessons learned are applicable to a wide range of experiences. Additional empirical studies can validate the theoretical framework and design claims put forward in this work.

## 2 PLAYING IMMEDIATELY

This paper is concerned with design aspects of immediate play. In order to describe those, a clear definition is required. The following paragraphs offer an outline of what we mean when we call an activity "immediate play".

Immediate play is a mode of playing. It can occur in many circumstances and in its simplest form is nothing more than a spontaneously entered state of playfulness. The behavior can be observed in children as well as adults, and can be regarded as a momentary state of mind.

Immediate play does not require a formal game. There are no immediate games; just situations that allow immediate play for some, sometimes all, participants. Audiovisual Environment Suite by Golan Levin [15] for example is not a game, but an art installation that allows museum visitors to express themselves using an easy-to-learn but expressive audiovisual instrument in an immediate play situation.

Immediate play is designed to allow for spontaneous joining and leaving. Immediate play can happen in groups or alone. Players join the game voluntarily or incidentally, depending on the design of the game. They might do so alone or in groups. Different players might join to varying degrees, taking up different roles in the game. Players also have to be able to drop out of the game easily. Both, joining and leaving, has to be as friction-less as possible for the other players. Pick-up play on public basketball courts would be an example for such a case. Escape Rooms, which are also entered unprepared and fit all other criteria for immediacy, are exceptions to this rule, since their whole purpose is to make it hard for the player to leave the game. Escape Rooms feature emergency exit procedures, though, to allow players to leave. This interrupts or even ends the game.

Immediate play, given its low barrier of entry and the possibility to easily join and leave, is especially prone to interfering with the reality outside the game. This property can be exploited in design. The popular live-action game Assassin sometimes features the rule that witnesses invalidate a game action, turning bystanders into unaware players.

Immediate play can transition into regular play, losing its immediacy over time. One could argue that all play starts in an immediate form, but for the sake of clarity, we will focus on the design of games that are aimed at being played in immediacy in this article. Play sessions can last between minutes and hours, and feature actions that repeat.

## 2.1 Playing in the World

Play situations that offer immediate play can be found in various places. They manifest in media as different to each other as mobile phones are to the public space. In those media, physical reality takes up different roles of varying significance. Single player offline games, played on a stationary screen, feature gameplay that is mostly taking place inside the game world, with the human body, the human-computer interface, and the screen being the only physical parts involved. Virtual reality games, installation-based experiences, and multiplayer videogames necessarily integrate physical reality into the act of playing to a far wider degree. Games in public space, from locative games to sports, from urban games to LARPs, are using the real world as a base constituent of the play experience. The design challenges these games face are very specific due to taking place in front of a background of everyday activity. Players have to overcome sociocultural norms and rules in order to join the game, as public play is subject to the "sociocultural construction of what we consider to be appropriate behavior within these public spaces" [18]. Clearly demarcating an area as a magic circle is a traditional method for establishing a different set of social rules for a space. People entering the marked area 'sign' a social contract that allows them, in this case, to play. In order to be turned into a player they have to enter a playful state of mind, thereby activating what Apter, calls the "protective frame"[3] – an invisible barrier between them and their surroundings that grants them the freedom to behave according to the game rules instead of to societal norms [29]. Establishing a safe space that allows players to enter the game is thus an act of creating the right spatial, sociocultural, and psychological environment, all of which influence each other. Doing so can be as easy as throwing a football into a crowd, or depend on month long preparation, depending on the intended game. All play has a physical component, even if it is only the body of the player. The relation between this physical component and the game shapes how immediate play manifests.

## 2.2 Playing in Context

Some kinds of public places, such as playgrounds and sports courts, are already marked as "magic circles". In other cases the magic circle is a construct that is only present in the minds of the players but invisible to non-participating passers-by. Game props can turn any space into a clearly marked play area, the recognizable utensils becoming the demarcation. The presence of a football and its observable use turns any space into a makeshift football pitch. The football comes with a context ready to be unlocked by the ad-hoc football players.

Context is in our argument used according to Dourish's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Context" [8], in that is not a stable background but a relational property between objects and activities that changes dynamically. In our case that means that participants in the activity create a context using a prop, the football. At the same time their activities are embedded in the existing context of the public space.

A football is a very broadly recognized object of play. More design effort is necessary to turn a lesser-known object, or an object with less playful context, into an invitation to play. The design challenge increases even more if the game is situated in an environment that does not support playfulness. Knowledge institutions like libraries, galleries and museums are not usually associated with play. Traditionally these places are hostile to intense social interaction or the production of noise, the first being a necessity of group play and the other a usual by-product of play. In this paper, we want to present a number of concrete techniques, established practices of designers of public games, to overcome these design challenges. Our focus is on turning people into players, more than on design strategies for the actual gameplay, because we regard the former as a particular challenge in designing games for immediate play.

## 2.3 Playing in the Dark

Notable implications of the context of public play are the presence of non-players and that most space is open to arbitrary kinds of use. Performance Studies researcher Richard Schechner introduced the term "Dark Play" [24] as a word describing play situations that are ambiguous, where rules are subverted or sabotaged, and the messaging is mixed. Schechner describes dark play as an overlapping of two different realities. One of them often is everyday life. With its low barrier of entry, immediate play is situated very close to everyday life and players are easily moving between those two

realities. An example of this clash of two realities happened during the performance game The Personal Adventure Automat [30], created in 2015 by The Street Game Conspiracy, when a performer mimicking to lay dead in the street was taken for being in trouble by people passing by [9]. According to Ehmann the actor had to step out of his role for a few moments to confirm that he is all right. To prevent such situations, Holly Gramazio [11] is "careful to make things seem either totally inconspicuous or fairly legible as some sort of gamesy artsy activity", thereby leading to a situation where gameplay is either clearly artificial or mostly invisible.

Urban games in particular, being played in public space, largely overlap with the everyday life of other people as they are played in presence of unsuspecting non-players. Sometimes hiding beneath the non-players, or evading them, is even part of the core gameplay. In Journey to the End of the Night [14], a citywide game of tag where the "chasers" have to catch other players, leading them to join their increasing ranks, players are only marked with ribbons on their arms. From distance and especially once the night begins, the chasers are nearly indiscernible from harmless non-players, making the player avoid all humans as much as possible. In order to do so one is inclined to venture into less populated areas. We did so while playing the game in Vienna in 2012. Dismissing the"no entry" signs, we crossed a private property and soon got caught by a security guard who thankfully simply guided us outside after a short explanation of the game wefire playing. The perceived safety of the protective frame led to a situation where the play reality overlapped with the non-play reality of trespassing.

Some urban games deliberately take players into dangerous areas. The Russian and Belarusian network Encounter [16, 25], which in January 2017 featured 717,300 registered users that have participated in 48,635 games[1], is a platform for urban games. Examples of these games include PhotoExtreme and the "Extreme Missions" of the game "Combat" that both feature potentially dangerous settings and tasks. Players of Encounter games, as well as the related game DozoR[2], have been injured and killed during gameplay according to various Russian sources. A certain sense of danger is part of the allure of these games[3]. While organizers seem to do their best to prevent accidents from happening, players are willing to risk their health for in-game success. A possible reason for this is that players assume that they are protected by the game when they are in fact not. This state of mind might again be a product of the protective frame: "[I]n the play-state you experience a protective frame which stands between you and the firealfi world and its problems, creating an enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come." [3], see also [29]

Yet the ethical grey area that games can manifest in can even be actively used when designing for raising awareness. If games openly encourage people to break social rules or even the law, they often hope for a reflection on the rules our society plays by. In the art project Abstract Tours by Laura Ruggeri [23], that took place in Berlin, Germany in 1997, participants were given a map of Berlin on which they drew routes using the different geometric shapes given to them by the artist. They would then follow this route as closely as possible. Rendell et al. [22] situate this practice in the situationist concept of "détournement", the embedding of artistic practices into a superior milieu [5]. By fragmenting the city and gaining a unique perspective during the tour guided by geometry, players assembled a new perspective, constructed a personal narrative starting from an objective map – "by re-describing the city, they invented it" [22], an act that can be regarded as political. Clearly, the line between critical practice, anti-capitalistic message, free-form play, and public art piece cannot be drawn easily. What can be said clearly is that this game leads the player to appropriating the city and can be immediately played by the audience. The appropriation of existing spaces is a typical by-product of immediate games. Whether it is in the scale of a city, a court, or a living room, immediate play manifests and takes over a space. For the player, the purpose of the space changes from an everyday setting to a place full of possibilities of play. They read space through the lens of the game while staying aware of the non-play nature of the space to a constantly changing degree. This overlap is the playing field for this kind of game and the experience comprises of both, everyday reality and the superimposed, embedded, overlapping reality of play (see also [20]).

## 3 DESIGNING FOR IMMEDIACY

There are very clear goals for the design of immediate play situations. Immediate play situations have to be recognizable and quickly understandable in the context of their presentation. Players have to be able to join and leave friction-free, and the fact that play space overlaps with non-play space has to be taken into account. In general terms, potential players often happen across games that are designed for immediate play by chance, observing them before joining. In that case they are first regarded as passers-by or unaware participants [17, 31]. While observing they become audience, entering a state where they are at least ambiguous about the game, maybe fully aware.

All design spaces offer particular sets of design dimensions. When it comes to play design, time is one such dimension, with games manifesting as anything between a short event and a continuous background over a long duration. Space is another design dimension. Closely related to it is the setting. Games can either be set in a contemporary or in a fictional time and place. They can be site-specific or -independent. The social side of playing offers a wealth of design dimensions. Is the game played in teams or individually, competitive or cooperative? Is the game visible or invisible? If it is visible, is there an audience present or is everyone present part of the game? Is the audience excluded from the core activity but actively engaged like in a soccer match? And how do the players relate to the audience? Do they show off their skills, perform, and express themselves, or do they focus on the challenges of a competition and try to excel in efficiency? Some of these design dimensions have an effect on the gamefis rules, which can be complex or simple, elaborate or straightforward. All of the dimensions can be and have been explored in games. All described design dimensions have an influence on the immediacy of play.

[1]Source: http://world.en.cx/Statistics.aspx
[2]http://www.dzzzr.ru/
[3]While there are clear similarities to extreme sports, the difference is that the games described here do not require training or preparation. They do not require expensive equipment or large time investment. Precisely the fact that they can be immediately joined increases the dangers for players.

### 3.1 Setting the Scene

The setting of a game that afford immediate play can be consciously chosen to be anything from close to everyday life to abstract fantasy. Immediate play benefits from settings that are readily understandable for the target audience. That means that picking a setting results in a selection of the audience. More elaborate settings that require prior knowledge select for players that possess said knowledge. Escape Rooms, for example, are themed to provide carefully curated settings. Given that the audience of such rooms is very varied, they mostly reference well-established cultural tropes. Fittingly, the Mystery Makers[4] room escape game "The Lab" features a very traditional lab setting. Interestingly, the puzzles themselves are only very loosely tied to the narrative. Presumably the designers of such rooms want to limit the amount of external knowledge necessary to solve the room to a minimum. That way they also level the playing field between players of different socialization and education. Given the commercial interest of Escape Room owners, this is a business decision that will have to be thought through again as competition increases[5]. Scrap, a Japanese live action game company that has been working in the field since 2007[6] offers Escape Rooms and live action games based on manga, video games, and other popular fiction. Adapting a franchise with a large fan base can be regarded as another way of delivering an easily decipherable setting to an audience.

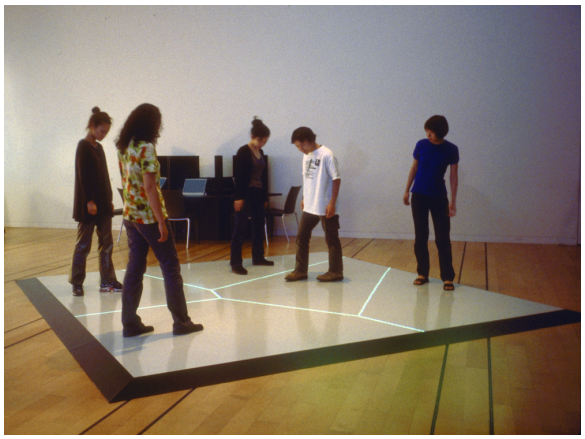

**Figure 1: Boundary Functions, an art installation by Scott Snibbe [27], that has a clearly visible boundary**

Escape Rooms per default offer a themed room to be explored on your own by a team. Everything that happens in the room is part of the game. Other games offer more complicated spatial configurations. The demarcation of different play zones – safe areas, play areas, observation areas, and so on – affects the interpretation of actions in different zones. In simple terms, the stage signifies that anything happening within it is a performance and should, therefore, be treated as such (see e.g. [17], p. 127). This "stage effect" works both ways; onlookers can comprehend what is part of the game and interpret it accordingly while participants gain the freedom to behave as free as the game suggests within the boundaries laid out in the physical space. At the same time, clearly outlining the boundaries of play also enables passers-by to become spectators, and if that is part of the game, spectators to join in as participants. A straightforward example of a playful installation piece that works with this mechanism is Scott Snibbefis Boundary Functions[7]. At the center of the piece is a top-down projection of a Voronoi diagram that splits the space around people in the projection area according to mathematical rules (see Figure 1). A passer-by might see people interacting with a system and become a spectator that observes the effect of the players on the spatial partitioning. Then, the spectator enters the playing field, which is clearly marked by the projection and interacts with the dynamic system, playfully exploring a mathematical formula. The authors of this paper have observed this behavior during an exhibition of the piece. In public games, or any other form of immediate play, leaving the play space has to be a voluntary and easily understood activity. To design for the refusal to participate or the wish to leave, means to clearly inform the player about her options to exit the game. The clearer it is whether someone is taking part in the game, the easier it is to become someone who is not. Exiting Journey to the End of the Night is as easy as taking off the ribbon that marks players. Players leave Boundary Functions simply by physically stepping away. In Starry Heavens by Nathalie Pozzi and Eric Zimmerman [34], the players create a circle around a central play area. They are constantly being pushed out of the game but can rejoin at any time, which "helps create a permeable boundary between the inside and the outside of the game" [33]. Zimmerman also observed that "while they are between rounds, players usually chat with spectators, explain what is happening, and encourage them to play" [33]. In this case, the act of joining and leaving becomes a part of the overall experience of the game. Players do not become pure spectators upon leaving but still have a function. This gradual shift between roles, from completely unaware to being an active player, is characteristic for all public games, and an area of design that multiplayer digital games can learn a lot from. While those often support different degrees of dedication, those are rarely the focus of design. While spontaneous, non-interrupting, and friction-less joining and leaving should be possible, it depends very much on the game, how it can be supported. Journey to the End of the Night, for example, can only be joined at the beginning but left at any moment without fundamentally changing the experience of other players. In this case, as in many others, the asymmetry of the game – meaning a large number of players is accommodated by a small number of facilitators – supports spontaneous opt-out. The game runs over a whole evening, and half of the night, and only a fraction of the players makes it to the end without getting caught by the hunters or opting out. In general, games that feature progression need additional design effort to allow for joining, and sometimes leaving, while the game is running. One thing to keep in mind at this point is that the experience does not have to be the same for all players. A game can offer different roles for different participants, some of them requiring more commitment and others less. There can be points during the game where new players can join, possibly only

[4] https://mysteryroom.dk/english
[5] For a list of thousands of Escape Rooms worldwide, go to http://escaperoomdirectory.com
[6] http://realescapegame.com/about/
[7] http://www.snibbe.com/projects/interactive/boundaryfunctions/

for a short time, and leave again. While the majority of traditional games offers the chance to a uniform experience to all players, this is far from the only way to design a game.

*3.1.1 Game Duration.* The longer a game takes, and the more of an anonymous mass-event it is, the more players will inevitably drop out. Depending on the context of the playing experience, the duration of a play situation can vary greatly. If a game takes place in a museum, up to ten minutes of attention can be expected from the audience, but not much more. Urban games can span hours and be repeated yearly while still retaining the characteristics of being immediately playable. Mobile phone games are often played on and off for months, sometimes years, but only in short sessions. The Danish Clapping Game, a Danish folk game of unknown origin popularized by the Copenhagen Game Collective is a good example of a pick-up-and-play social game that has a session duration of several minutes for experienced players but only seconds for the less masterful ones. The only classes of games that maintain immediate play over a long period of time are those that continuously confront the player with new sensations. Reality television shows would be a good example of a format that thrives on putting participants into surprising situations (see [17], pp. 251-254, for an example). These games are the long duration equivalent of Assassin in that they force the players into new situations that they have to solve with a limited tool set and bound by very strict rules.

Game formats with longer duration, as well as other persistent game formats, often offer safe spaces (or times) to allow players to take a break. In Journey To The End of the Night, there are safe areas and players are safe while traveling in public transport. While the game uses a map to signify safe areas, those are additionally marked at location. Safe spaces are natural gathering points for spectators and can be used to offer them to join the game. Designing the physical space of the game can draw attention to it, but so can the use of costumes, unusual props, and sound and light. Even just encouraging players to perform unusual actions or bodily movements can serve as a way to attract spectators. Sebastian Quack [21] mentions Turtle Wushu [13] as a game that draws players in by being recognizable and easy to understand just by observing for a few minutes. Pokémon Go [19], a locative game, is an example of a game that has too steep a learning curve to allow immediate play, but that provokes bodily movement so distinct that it is easily recognizable from afar. These movements do not specifically indicate that what the players are experiencing on their smartphones is a game. Eric Zimmerman told us that he is explicitly not interested in making clear that there is "a game" going on but would much rather like to "communicate that there is some kind of event or project happening" [33]. Potential players do not care much if something is regarded as a game, a playful experience, a social experiment, or a light physical exercise.

*3.1.2 Marking the Player.* Another way of communicating that people are engaged in a special event is to mark the players, e.g. by having them wear costumes. This has the additional benefit that the use of costumes transports players into the world the game takes place in: "The experience of wearing clothes triggers associated abstract concepts and their symbolic meanings. In particular, we posit that wearing clothes causes people to 'embody' the clothing and its symbolic meaning." [1]

We acknowledge that the psychology of play is complicated and that we can only look at very few aspects of it in the limited scope of this paper. One such aspect, evident in the quote above, is that players in immediate play situations act in a compound reality composed of the play reality and the physical world. While transitioning in and out of the play situation easily, they incorporate both, the role they play as well as the person they have been before assuming the role. The fact that after hosting Journey to the End of the Night in Vienna for more than five years, with hundreds of players playing a sophisticated version tag throughout the city in the dark of the night, there has not been a single accident suggests that physical reality does not get replaced by an imaginary world completely. The more dangerous darkly played games mentioned above are designed to further risk-taking of players. We can follow from this that how much of the player's attachment to the physical world is maintained and turned into a part of the experience can be influenced by the designer, turning this aspect of game design into yet another design dimension.

## 3.2 Conducting the Experience

Douglas Wilson [32] hints at the power of ambiguity in socially played games. The ad-hoc interpretation and creation of rules during gameplay is in fact a repeating pattern found in immediate play situations. Designing rules to leverage this ambiguity is key to allowing players to appropriate the game. This way, players create their own experience, expanding on the original design. While doing so, players need guidance, the amount and kind of which is one of the most important design areas when creating immediate play situations.

*3.2.1 Joining and Leaving.* In order to be easy to pick up and inviting to play, rules for starting to play have to be readily understandable. Finding out implications of rules is always part of play, but a clear starting point eases the player into the magic circle. A ritual can serve this purpose [33]. The more complex the rules are and the more foreign the mechanics and the theme is to the player, the more informationfis has to be provided. How much effort has to be put into communicating the game depends a lot on the clarity of design. It helps a lot if every piece of the game is easily identifiable. In a puzzle game this means that there are no elements that distract from the solution. The technique of Escape Rooms to shut down the outside world by locking in the player is a great example of creating clarity in design. Every item in such rooms is intentionally placed there, and either part of a puzzle or just in the room to create the right atmosphere, offering a clearly structured game of progression [12]. In games where the act of playing gradually reveals the game, on the other hand, the playersfi tendency to seek clarity can be exploited as a driver for motivation. Alternate reality games have rules that are not explained fully in any place. Players get to know the rules through close observation of interaction with the game, just like they do in the above mentioned art installation Boundary Functions. This mode of playing calls for intensive play testing. [33] says that depending on the project, up to 50% of his play testing effort is targeted at testing the learning of the rules.

*3.2.2 Exploring the Rules.* Rules can be explained in passive, active or interactive form. A passive explanation relies on text or

images, sound or vision. Active guidance requires a guiding system or a moderator that guides the players into or through the game. Interactive guidance can either be implemented by an interactive electronic system or by having the player interact with facilitators. Most of the game makers interviewed state that they are inviting and introducing players verbally by themselves, a technique that gets the more impractical the bigger and longer a game is [33]. Gramazio, Zimmerman and Ehmann [9, 11, 33] speak of staff members that are instructed to invite and guide players. If an instructor moderates throughout the game, she is a moderator. A moderator can shape the direction of the game by influencing players. If she actively interprets the actions of the player and adapts the gameplay accordingly, she is a game master – someone who adapts the game to the current situation and moderates both ways between the rule set and the players. In sports, this role is the referee, a person that is responsible for observing if the players follow rules but that has the liberty and responsibility to shape the flow of the game. Seen from that angle, referees are as much conductors as they are judges. In general, a game master needs to have the autonomy to adapt the game. This can be designed into the systems and must be communicated clearly.

*3.2.3 Moderating the Game.* The relationship between players and the game and the role moderation plays largely depends on what could be called the topology of a game. If there are multiple players involved in the same game, at some point their input has to be combined and fed into the game system. In traditional videogames this is done per input. Every player has a controller and the input of the players is combined by the game. In the case of a game that is played by a crowd, like Colorave [28] is, this act of combination can be implemented by filming the crowd with a camera and analyzing their movement patterns. In a game without technology the combination can be executed by a mediator who translates the group actions into changes in the game state. Combinations of the above systems are also possible, such as in the game Sentree [10] where one player has agency in the game whereas the other players are pure observers. The act of combining the input of all players is a key part of interacting with the game.

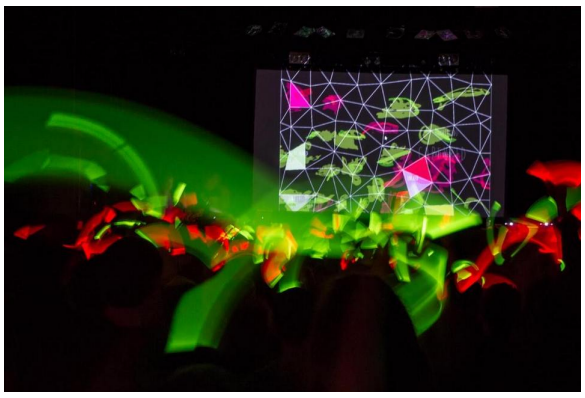

**Figure 2: Colorave, a crowd game by A. Clausen & S. Stålhandske [28], that is conducted by a game master**

The above-mentioned crowd game Colorave [28] is an example of a game that depends largely on active moderation (see Figure 2). The game is played in two teams. The teams are identified using glow sticks of different colors. Those are tracked via a camera. Gameplay consists of waggling the glow stick in different ways depending on instructions displayed on a large projection, while loud dance floor music invites players to dance. The game master, as a master of ceremony, does not only negotiates between the game and the rules, but also is responsible for shaping the whole experience despite the game being supported by dedicated technology. In order to give the game master additional control over the proceedings, the game features an interface for triggering various game states, in fact allowing for overriding the hard coded gameplay at will. The game thus becomes more of a mixed media performance piece than a match between teams. And while the outcome of a single round is that one team wins, the overall outcome is that all players win by having a good time. It is a party game in the truest of senses and a showcase of how technology can be used to support a certain kind of gameplay instead of to control the observation of rules.

## 3.3 The Role of Technology

The interviewed game makers use a variety of media to communicate clue after clue to the player, starting with an invitation to join the game that can take the form of an email, a website, a bulletin board message, or a verbal introduction.

**Figure 3: Johann Sebastian Joust, an easy to read local multiplayer game without screen by Die Gute Fabrik [6]**

Additionally to instructors, interactive systems can assume the role of the facilitator. Similar to a live game master they can adapt the game rules to the situation and communicate them. The choice of technology for a game that is meant to be enjoyed immediately depends on the players it wants to attract. In general, the broader the addressed audience, the more universal or invisible the technology should be. The most powerful piece of technology that most people on this planet, independent of their location, have with them is the smartphone. Rider Spoke, an art game by Blast Theory [4], uses a bicycle and a smartphone as an approachable and easy to use technological basis. Both are devices that players are familiar with and that support the concept of the game, which is based on navigation through a city. Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally OK Now

(B.U.T.T.O.N.), by Die Gute Fabrik [7, 32]), on the other hand uses gamepads and simple instructions on a screen to create a situation that is familiar to a more specific target audience, players of games. Johann Sebastian Joust, another game by Die Gute Fabrik [6], uses the easily understandable Sony Move controllers for controlling the game (see Figure 3). While the devices themselves are unfamiliar to a lot of players, the way they are used in Joust is easily understood. The game is a blend of jousting and musical chairs in that it allows you to move while the music is playing and asks you to hold still if it fades out. If you are moving the controller, e.g. because you are evading an opponent, while the music is silent, you lose the game. A more familiar technological solution would not make the game more accessible in this case.

These examples of successfully using technology without making it a barrier to playfulness illustrate that there are at least two working design solutions. First, a technology that is perfectly supporting the gameplay and does not require any learning specific to the game can be used. Second, technology that is familiar, in other words part of the everyday reality of the players, can offer a similarly low barrier of entry. The social nature of a lot of everyday technologies is a natural starting point for game design. Measuring and controlling players and their adherence to rules is another design dimension.

While Johann Sebastian Joust uses technology to control the rule-conformance of the players, B.U.T.T.O.N. displays rules but cannot observe if those are followed. Colorave sits between those extremes in that it offers the possibility to override the game system on the fly. Wilson [32], one of the designers of B.U.T.T.O.N, describes the function of goals in the game as being purposefully designed to "motivate players to hijack, modify, or otherwise subvert" [32] the game. These so-called unachievements are implemented as the gamefis failure to monitor the playersfi behavior. They rely on the autonomy of the players and support their will to appropriate the game. Games offering unachievements provide for a wide range of play styles since players are encouraged to probe what parts of the game is technologically enforced and how much freedom there is. In summary, whether technology builds barriers around a game or allows for otherwise impossible gameplay experiences depends on the target group of the play situation as much as on the concrete implementation. Carefully implemented technological systems can enable new gameplay situations that could not be created without them, leveraging the familiarity of electronic devices, empowering game masters and creating new areas of play to be explored.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNING FOR IMMEDIATE PLAY

The following techniques and strategies have proven useful for the game designers who answered the questionnaire as well as the authors of this article in designing for immediacy:

- *Chose an easy to understand setting.* This can be either a familiar setting or one that does not require too much prior knowledge.
- *Mark the players.* Distinguish players from non-players by using easy to recognize body movements, props or costumes. Alternatively the physical space can be used to signify that everyone on the playing field is part of the game.
- *Make the players observable.* Having the players perform in plain sight breaks down barriers of joining. It is not necessary that the game looks very playful, it should just make participant behavior easily distinguishable from everyday behavior.
- *Joining and leaving should be clearly explained.* All players should know how to join and how to leave the game. A ritual helps in making the process of joining the game more explicit. So does a physical border that can be easily crossed, like that of a stage or other marked area. Joining and leaving should not interrupt the game for other players, if possible.
- *Rules can be explained in a passive, active or interactive form.* Deciding how to explain the rules is most likely the part of design that requires the most attention when designing an immediate game. Implicit player limitations through game design are often easier to understand than explicit instructions.
- *Pick the right kind of facilitator for your game.* Instructor explains the game to new players. Moderators are interactive instructors that guide the players through the game. Game masters actively interpret rules and interact with different game system throughout the game session.
- *Make technology invisible.* Successful deployment of technology in immediate games can build on familiarity with devices or simplicity of interaction. Technology can also be used by the game master alone while the player experience is fully analog.

## 5 SUMMARY

Throughout this article we have used examples of immediate play to illustrate their design dimensions and some best practices that have been used successfully to address these dimensions. Designers have to make decisions about practical, ethical, formal, and communicational aspects of their game long before the game starts and, if it is played live, for the duration of the game.

Immediate play, an unprepared mode of playing, can only occur if joining the game is frictionless for the player in question as well as other players in the game. The simplicity of becoming a part of the game is helped if the game is clearly marked, has a familiar setting, and can be joined by a very simple act. Marking the play space in the physical world or the social sphere helps in establishing the protective frame that allows for perceived safety of play. This protective frame is always situated in the real world and the fictional. This overlap between physical reality and fictional reality, often the background of immediate play situations, can be used as a design resource. It is the compound space where immediate play occurs, its ambiguity being part of the allure of immediate play. Reality bleeding into play leads to a state of mind that allows the play reality to shape the real world experience, too, as manifest when an urban game "makes [people] more aware of how [they] are typically guided to use the city in a certain way" [2] by making them change the perception of their surroundings.

Technology can be used as a mediator between those realities or to open up entirely new possibilities of play.

A well-designed immediate play experience maintains and cherishes the ambiguity of play. For regardless of the clarity of communication, players probe the rules, make up their own, and find new interpretations. That is the essence of immediate play.

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